

Senator Mike Hewitt



2004 Legislative Report • 16th District

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Committees:

- Commerce and Trade, vice chair
- Natural Resources, Energy and Water, vice chair
- Ways and Means, vice chair; and Capital Budget, chair
- Facilities and Operation
- Rules

Dear Friends,

Recently, several news stories talked about how the economy was starting to turn around. We've seen a couple of good signs that things may be getting better for us thanks to the no-new-general tax budget the Legislature passed last year, along with several business friendly bills. However, the whole point was to help businesses hire more people, which provide jobs to everyone.

If we want to move our economy, people need to be working. Jobs, jobs and more jobs will be my focus this year. We need to get people back to work, therefore I plan to consider bills that either produce more jobs in our communities and within our state or will help industries expand, which again provides more jobs.

As your state senator, I represent you and want to hear your comments and suggestions. Please feel free to contact my office in Olympia anytime via the toll-free legislative hotline at (800) 562-6000.

Regards,

Mike Hewitt

16th District Senator



Jobs, jobs and more jobs... for Washington

Right now we need jobs for Washington citizens, and we don't have any time to waste. After reviewing several ways to help the economy, I've decided to narrow my focus on those areas that would have the greatest impact.

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Minimum Wage

Today, Washington's minimum wage is \$7.16/hour — the highest minimum wage in the country! Businesses continue to describe the need to reduce jobs because minimum wage continues to climb. I will be pushing Senate Bill 5697 again, which links our minimum wage to the state's unemployment rate. This means that when our unemployment rate is below the national average, the minimum wage continues to go up like normal. However, if our unemployment rate is above the national rate, we freeze the minimum wage until our economy improves.

For example, under this measure, if the rate of inflation was 3 percent for 2003, and Washington's unemployment rate was below the national rate for six of the 12 months, then Washington's minimum wage would increase by only 1.5 percent.

By regulating our out-of-control minimum wage, we'll help save jobs! The Senate passed this bill last session; however, it was stopped in the Democrat-controlled House. If we do not get this bill passed in both chambers it will once again stop people from working. This issue is too important to let it die.

Tort Reform

Frivolous lawsuits and excessive pain and suffering (non-economic damage) awards are costing Washington consumers millions of dollars annually. People are losing their jobs, and companies, especially small firms, are going out of business.

I will support Senate Bill 5728 again, which will bring stability, consistency and a sense of fairness back into the civil justice system. I fully believe an injured person should receive payments on all future wages, medical bills, costs related to the injury and payment for in-home care — which is exactly what SB 5728 protects.



Sen. Mike Hewitt talking with Skip Novakovich about economic development and the potential for more jobs in the 16th District.

This bill only focuses on the non-economic damage, which is money awarded for intangible issues, such as pain and suffering, mental anguish or loss of companionship. Someone who is injured should receive enough money to take care of their needs, but the non-economic damage awards are driving the cost of health insurance through the roof.

For example, Washington malpractice claims in 2001 cost insurers \$44.7 million. This cost is passed on to us. We need to reduce these claims to make insurance more affordable for everyone.

Unfortunately, the Democrat-controlled House, along with personal injury attorneys (the biggest benefactors), will continue to oppose this bill. It's a shame that they are not willing to help Washington's economy produce more jobs for you.

Capital Budget



Last month, I had the privilege of being appointed chair of the Capital Budget. This appointment is a great opportunity for our district. The Capital Budget handles all of the construction (non-transportation) projects

within the state. In addition, these projects provide construction jobs.

As chair, I hope to expand the agricultural industry, create avenues to market our resources and improve our state parks. One area of interest is a mechanized asparagus picker. In our district, the asparagus industry plays a major role in the economy. This delicate vegetable requires a person to harvest it, which raises its production cost. (*minimum wage issue*)

I plan to take a closer look at this innovative device to see if the state can save this cash crop industry. Unfortunately, some jobs may be lost if we can use the new harvester; however new jobs will be created

in order to run and maintain the machinery. If we don't do something soon to save this industry, we are going to lose all of the asparagus related jobs.

Water

For years now, Washington's water rights management system has been broken. The system has backlogs of water permit applications, an inability to determine some water rights and uncertainty raised by court decisions. For our cities, farmers and businesses, water has become a major issue.

We are losing jobs because water permits for farmlands are never given and businesses that need water wait in a long line of other permit applicants. We need a faster, simpler process for water right transactions. In addition, there must be certainty and flexibility for water right holders. This new process is critical to the economic viability of our state. I'm working on this issue with other eastern Washington senators. Several bills are being proposed, but as of yet, we are not sure what the best solution will be.

Last year, I sponsored and passed legislation dealing with the loss of water rights. This year you may see even more drastic measures being taken to fix our deteriorating permit system.



Outlawing studded tires?

Word is spreading of a bill to outlaw all studded tires in Washington or at least put a heavy state fee on anyone who uses them. Talk about a job killer. When winter hits, every tire store in town is swamped as Eastern Washingtonians switch to studded tires. Apparently, those senators who live on the other side of the mountains don't know what it's like when winter comes to our side of the state. I'll continue to monitor this issue, but would like to hear your comments on the matter.



Legislator of the Year

*The Wine Institute recently honored me
with their first-time-ever
Legislator of the Year award
for representing their industry
in the Legislature.*

*This industry is quickly becoming
an economic engine within our state
and a leading wine contender
among national and international markets.*